

WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE ON THE  
HOMELESSNESS ACT

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REPORT

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS  
UNITED STATES SENATE

TO ACCOMPANY

S. 485

TO AUTHORIZE A WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE  
ON HOMELESSNESS

together with

ADDITIONAL VIEWS



OCTOBER 19 (legislative day, OCTOBER 2), 1990.—Ordered to be printed

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## WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE ON HOMELESSNESS ACT

OCTOBER 19 (legislative day, OCTOBER 2), 1990.—Ordered to be printed

Mr. GLENN, from the Committee on Governmental Affairs,  
submitted the following

### REPORT

together with

### ADDITIONAL VIEWS

[To accompany S. 485]

The Committee on Governmental Affairs, to which was referred the bill (S. 485) to authorize a White House Conference on Homelessness, having considered the same, reports favorably thereon and recommends that the bill be passed without amendment.

#### PURPOSE OF THE LEGISLATION

This bill would authorize a White House Conference on Homelessness to be preceded by State and regional conferences with at least one such Conference being held in each State and the District of Columbia. The National Conference will call together individuals concerned with programs and issues, both public and private, relating to homelessness. This assembly will be charged with the responsibility of examining homelessness and developing specific and comprehensive recommendations for appropriate executive and legislative action to address the problem of homelessness.

Furthermore, the Conference will review existing laws and regulations related to public policy regarding homeless individuals and homelessness and make specific recommendations for improvements.

With rising rents, insufficient funds for public assistance programs, and other environmental factors, homelessness has increased dramatically during the past decade. It is estimated that more than three million men, women and children are homeless in America today. One third of this group are families. Many are literally in the streets and shelters of America as we speak. Far more

have found temporary shelter, doubled and tripled up with relatives or friends, living each day with the sure knowledge that the next descent to the streets and shelters is as close as the next domestic dispute. The causes of this drastic increase during the last decade are varied.

The federal response to this increase has been limited. The McKinney Act was passed in 1987 and established the Interagency Council on the Homeless to coordinate, monitor and improve the federal response to the problems of homelessness. The Act also established an Emergency Food and Shelter program. It authorized grants and demonstration programs for emergency shelters, primary health services, some mental health services, education of homeless children, and job training. This law has been the most important legislative initiative on homelessness to date.

As the problem continues to grow, the next step in homeless policy needs to be defined. A coherent long-range policy and a plan for implementing that policy must be developed. The purpose for holding regional and national conferences is to take the federal response to the problem of homelessness beyond temporary, overnight solutions by developing a comprehensive, coherent strategy for adequately meeting the needs of the nation's homeless.

The task of the delegates to this conference would be to draft a national policy and a master plan for implementing that policy with specific recommendations for legislative action. We must insure that homeless individuals are offered every opportunity to become self supporting and insure that those who may lack that capacity are adequately cared for.

The ultimate goal of this Conference will be to stop and reverse the trend of increased homelessness in the United States.

#### LEGISLATIVE HISTORY

Introduced March 1, 1989 by Senators Gore, Dodd, Heinz, Kerry, Rockefeller, Sasser, Shelby, and Stevens. Referred to the Committee on Governmental Affairs. The Committee on Governmental Affairs voted favorably to pass the bill out of Committee on June 7, 1990.

#### REGULATORY IMPACT

None.

#### COST ESTIMATES

Congressional Budget Office estimate attached. It is estimated that the White House Conference on Homelessness will host approximately 1,500 participants. The Conference would be operated under the auspices of the Interagency Council on the Homeless, but there will be a staff created to handle all activities, planning and administrative work connected with the Conference, funded by a separate appropriation authorized by this bill.

#### CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET OFFICE—COST ESTIMATE

1. Bill number: S. 485.
2. Bill title: White House Conference on Homelessness Act.

3. Bill status: As introduced and referred to the Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs on March 1, 1989.

4. Bill purpose: To authorize a White House Conference on Homelessness.

5. Estimated cost to the Federal Government:

[By fiscal years, in millions of dollars]

|                                        | 1991 | 1992 | 1993 | 1994 | 1995 |
|----------------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Estimated:                             |      |      |      |      |      |
| Authorized levels:                     |      |      |      |      |      |
| White House Conference .....           | 1.5  |      |      |      |      |
| Assistance for local conferences ..... | 4.5  |      |      |      |      |
| Total .....                            | 6.0  |      |      |      |      |
| Estimated outlay levels:               |      |      |      |      |      |
| White House Conference .....           | .5   | 1.0  |      |      |      |
| Assistance for local conferences ..... | 4.0  | .5   |      |      |      |
| Total .....                            | 4.5  | 1.5  |      |      |      |

Note.—The costs of this bill fall within budget function 600.

Basis of estimate: S. 485 authorizes such sums as may be necessary for conferences on homelessness at both the national and local levels. Authorizations are estimated by the Congressional Budget Office, and are assumed to be fully appropriated at the beginning of fiscal year 1991.

The bill would require the President to hold a National White House Conference on Homelessness within 18 months of enactment. The conference delegates would then be responsible for reporting their findings and recommendations not later than six months after the conference is convened. Based on information provided by the Interagency Council of Homelessness, a conference of this magnitude, with approximately 1,500 participants, would require an executive director and at least four additional full-time staff members to organize. The cost of staff, materials, a facility in which to hold the conference, and the report of recommendations would cost approximately \$1.5 million dollars. Most of the costs would be incurred in fiscal year 1992, the year in which the conference would be held, but because it would take about a year to organize the conference, approximately a third of the costs could be incurred in fiscal year 1991.

The bill would also require that at least one local conference on homelessness be held in each state and the District of Columbia before the National White House Conference. The bill would direct the Interagency Council on Homelessness to assist in the organization and conduct of the local conferences. Based on the attendance record of Interagency Council on Homelessness' regional conferences, it is assumed that an average of 400 people would participate in each local conference. It is also assumed that one full-time staff person and two additional support staff would be needed for six months to organize each conference. Staff, materials, and space in which to hold each conference, would cost about \$4.5 million dollars for 51 conferences. The costs would be incurred in fiscal years

1991 and 1992. The outlays are estimated using spendout rates computed by CBO on the basis of recent program data.

S. 485 would allow a maximum registration fee of \$10 per attendee at the national and local conferences. If such a fee were installed, the federal government could save approximately \$0.2 million dollars, given the participation projections.

6. Estimated cost to State and local government: None.

7. Estimate comparison: None.

8. Previous CBO estimate: None.

9. Estimate prepared by: Karen Graham.

10. Estimate approved by: C.G. Nuckols (for James L. Blum, Assistant Director for Budget Analysis).

#### SECTION-BY-SECTION ANALYSIS

##### *Sec. 1: Short title*

"White House Conference on Homelessness Act."

##### *Sec. 2: Authorization of conference*

(a) President is authorized to call and conduct the Conference within 18 months of enactment.

(b) Authorizes State and regional conferences under the auspices of the Executive Director of the Interagency Council on the Homeless. While there are currently regional conferences sponsored by the Interagency Council on the Homeless and authorized by the Stewart McKinney Act, this provision will not cause a duplication of effort.

Because the causes and symptoms of homelessness are heavily influenced by environmental factors (i.e. employment, propensity of substance abuse, housing shortages) it is important for people within a state to coordinate efforts and communicate what they've learned. The Conferences authorized in this section would bring together providers and advocates within a state to discuss problems unique to their area, exchange ideas, coordinate efforts and, most importantly, discuss new long-term initiatives. Coordination of effort and services is an essential element in utilizing limited homelessness-related funding in the most effective and efficient way possible. The long-term initiatives should share as a common goal reducing the numbers of homelessness through treatment and permanent housing.

##### *Sec. 3: Purposes of the conference*

The Conference is meant to increase public awareness, identify the problems, assemble individuals involved in the issues and programs related to homelessness, review existing laws and programs, and make recommendations for executive and legislative action. The Conference participants will be charged with mapping out a comprehensive policy aimed toward decreasing homelessness and a plan for implementing that policy.

The Stewart McKinney Act and many state and local efforts address needs of homeless individuals on an emergency basis (i.e. overnight shelter, soup kitchens, short-term health care). This work has proven invaluable. It has protected millions of people from sleeping on the streets in freezing temperatures. But it is now time

to develop a long-term national agenda that leads to increased permanent housing for the homeless and adequate, comprehensive treatment for their medical and mental health needs.

*Sec. 4: Conference participants*

(a) The State and regional conferences will be open to individuals concerned with issues and programs, both public and private, related to homelessness. This includes people who are or who have been homeless. The provision prohibits any fee or charge being imposed on any attendee except a registration fee of \$10. Exception should be given to a registration fee in the case of an indigent individual.

(b) Each State and regional conference will select a delegate to attend the White House Conference. In addition, delegates will be appointed (one each) by each Governor, each member of the House of Representatives, each member of the Senate, and Mayor of any city with a population of 175,000 or more. Each organization enumerated in the McKinney Act may also appoint a delegate and one alternate. The President may appoint 100 delegates and up to 30 alternates.

The delegates should be involved in providing services to or advocacy for homeless individuals. This includes people involved in organizations other than those listed in the McKinney Act and individuals that may be homeless.

*Sec. 5: Planning and administration of conference*

(a) Federal agencies are required to assist with the Conference.

(b) The Executive Director of the Interagency Council on the Homeless is authorized to help organize the state and regional conferences, enter contracts for carrying out the act, and provide materials for the National Conference. However, the Conference will not detract from the Interagency's primary responsibilities which are set forth in the McKinney Act. This bill provides for a staff in addition to the existing Interagency staff. The staff authorized by this bill will coordinate the State and the National Conferences. These Conferences will enhance, not duplicate, the work currently being done under the McKinney Act by the Interagency Council.

(c) Each participant shall be responsible for his or her expenses related to attending the Conference.

(d) The President is authorized to appoint a Conference director and staff and to assign federal personnel to help with the Conference. The Executive Director and staff will be responsible for the Conference and all activities related to the Conference. Any additional personnel will have very limited responsibilities.

*Sec. 6: Reports*

A final report will be required within 6 months. The final report will be compiled by the Conference staff. The report should include a thorough examination of homelessness and specific and comprehensive recommendations for appropriate executive and legislative action to address the problem of homelessness.

*Sec. 7: Follow-up*

The Interagency Council on the Homeless is required to update the President and Congress on the progress of the Conference's recommendations in its annual report, already required by law.

*Sec. 8: Availability of funds*

Authorizes sums as may be necessary for the Conference, forbids the use of McKinney Act funds for the Conference except those specifically appropriated for the Conference, and returns unexpended funds to the Treasury.

## ADDITIONAL VIEWS OF WILLIAM V. ROTH, JR.

S. 485 was placed on the markup agenda and considered by the Governmental Affairs Committee during its meeting June 7, 1990, without benefit of any hearing having been held, or any other record being established by the Committee to provide justification for the measure.

The ultimate goal of coordinating a national effort to address the needs of the homeless is an important mission. In light of this, the Governmental Affairs Committee, through the reauthorization of the McKinney Act in the fall of 1988 and again on July 25, 1990, specifically charged the Interagency Council on the Homeless, through the Dept. of Housing and Urban Development, with the responsibility of scheduling regional workshops, and with being a clearinghouse for receiving and disseminating information regarding all relevant homeless programs.

Some have expressed the view that the role of the Interagency Council is to provide professional and technical assistance in understanding the federal programs available to serve the homeless community, and not to develop recommendations for legislative initiatives; but that is clearly not the way the statute was written and signed into law.

Important provisions of the McKinney Act regarding the mandate for the council are as follows:

(A) interpret regulations and assist in the application process for Federal assistance, including grants;

(B) provide assistance on the ways in which Federal programs, other than those authorized under this Act, may best be coordinated to complement the objectives of this Act;

(C) develop recommendations and program ideas based on regional specific issues in serving the homeless population; and

(D) establish a schedule for biennial regional workshops to be held by the Council in each of the 10 standard Federal regions to further carry out and provide the assistance \* \* \*.

The Interagency Council has been organizing the regional workshops, as opposed to individual conferences in each of the 50 states as called for in S. 485. However each state has designated an individual to serve as a contact person. Also, the Interagency Council makes field visits to individual states to address special needs of a particular state.

The agenda of a regional workshop held this past summer in Philadelphia included such topics as:

Employment job training/promoting self-sufficiency;

Discussing the obtaining of Federal real and personal property for use by the homeless;

An overview of McKinney housing programs; providing assistance through H.U.D.;

Analyzing non-McKinney funding and the use of other Federal programs.

Also, the 1989 Annual report of the Interagency Council indicates that 23 states have actually established their own Council, with several other states designating a lead agency.

This all gives me the impression that the Interagency Council is currently working in both an active and productive manner to carry out the mandate it was given in the 1988 law. The Council has been reaching out to state and local groups, as well as national organizations as a part of their effort to receive input from all interested parties. This raises a substantial question as to the merits of S. 485.

The Interagency Council should be allowed to fulfill its current mandate under the McKinney Act, giving Congress the opportunity to evaluate the information currently being gathered to determine whether or not a separate set of additional workshops or a National White House Conference is the most productive use of our resources on behalf of the homeless. The Interagency Council is a direct result of recommendations from a previous White House Council on the Homeless. It should be given a chance to complete its work.

Perhaps there will be a need in the future to bring together representatives from all the departments and agencies with jurisdiction over portions of the homeless programs with the highest levels of the Administration to receive the recommendations of the Interagency Council. And if it turns out that the current workshops are not providing adequate information, Congress can entertain the idea of changing or adding to the requirements of the Interagency Council. But at present there is no evidence to warrant the expansion as proposed in S. 485.

To date the Bush Administration has supported full funding to carry out the programs currently authorized under the McKinney Act authorization. There has been no request from the Administration or the Interagency Council to expand its staff or add additional conferences.

Furthermore, in these times of a national budget crisis, it appears irresponsible to authorize allocation of some \$6 million to, as the report states, develop "specific recommendations for legislative action" on behalf of the homeless when like studies and reports already have been undertaken as mandated by previous legislation.

I reiterate, I have no opposition to a coordinated effort to address the problems of the homeless. However, the Interagency Council is in place to carry out that purpose, and I believe we should allow them to complete their current agenda with no additional mandates at this time.

WILLIAM V. ROTH, Jr.

#### CHANGES IN EXISTING LAW

None.

